



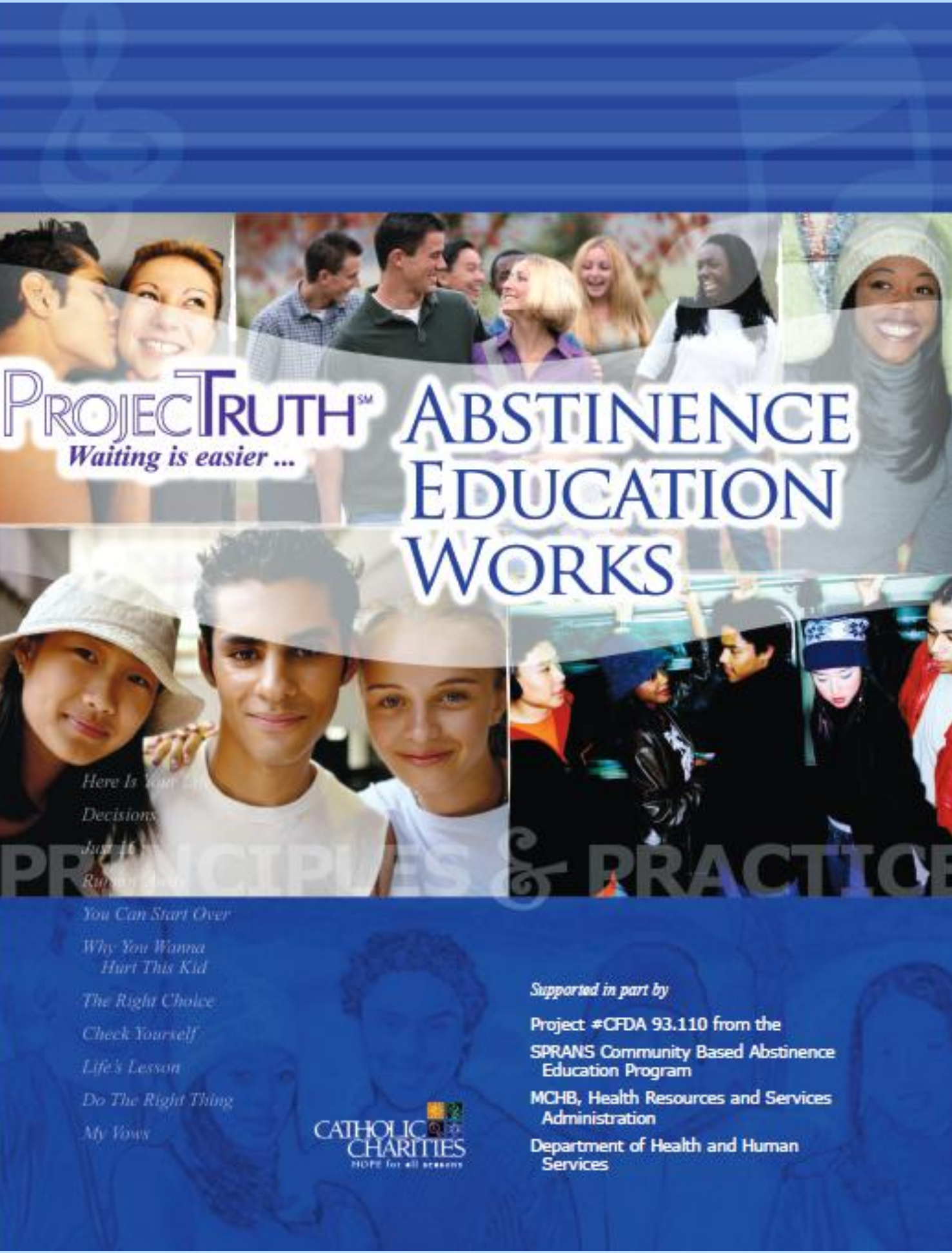
Community-Based Abstinence Education
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Grant Number # 90AE0197

ProjecTruth: A Character-Based Abstinence Until Marriage Program

Douglas M. Scheidt, Ph.D.; Judith Vogtli, Ph.D.²; Arvela Heider, Ph.D.³
¹SUNY College at Brockport, ²Catholic Charities of Buffalo, ³Holark Systems

ABSTRACT

This presentation describes findings for ProjecTruth's Abstinence Until Marriage program 2007-2009. The evaluation plan included: 1) attendance (dose) and completion; and 2) pre/post/follow-up assessments of knowledge, attitudes, intentions and behaviors. Data were compared with a comparison group of data from the 2001-2006 ProjecTruth participants. Pretest/Post-test data were the focus of analyses. Also, a subset of respondents were included in six and twelve month follow-up. Long-term follow-up was based on a sample of twelfth graders. A total of 89.8% of respondents completed the program. Overall, the abstinence education curriculum demonstrated consistently significant and lasting effects on knowledge, attitudes, intentions and parent-teen communication behaviors. There was not a significant effect on current sexual activity. There was a significant dose-response relationship between number of classes and current sexually activity, such that the larger the number of classes taught, the less likely the student was to report current sexual activity.



PURPOSE

The purpose of ProjecTruth's federal grant program was to educate young people about abstinence until marriage as defined by Section 510(b)(2) of the Title V of the Social Security Act, and create an environment within communities that supports teen decisions to postpone sexual activity until marriage. ProjecTruth utilized its own curriculum and guidebook LifeSongs: Make the Right Choice. Based within Catholic Charities of Buffalo, ProjecTruth has been federally funded since 2001 to provide abstinence education to adolescents. This data represents two years of a five year (2007-2012) grant cycle.

CONTACT

Douglas M. Scheidt, Ph.D., Dean
School of Education & Human Services
The College at Brockport
State University of New York
dscheidt@brockport.edu
(585) 395-2510

INTRODUCTION

Western New York (WNY) has an ongoing epidemic of early sexual activity, adolescent pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and substance abuse among adolescents within the eight counties. Buffalo's adolescent pregnancy rate for 2004 (latest data available) was 133.7 per 1000, which far exceeds the rate for New York City of 101.8 per 1000.

The rationale and evidence supporting ProjecTruth was grounded in the Social Cognitive Theory of Change (SCT) coupled with the Resiliency Model of Prevention and the Developmental Assets Approach. The ProjecTruth curriculum product was titled, LifeSongs: Make the Right Choice. It provided youth with a fact-based and positive presentation of the benefits of abstinence until marriage. It used a character education model. Lesson plans and activities were intended for middle and high school-aged youth and were to be delivered in school and community settings. Many activities employed a music metaphor expressed in the accompanying CD. Make the Right Choice was a selection of songs written especially for ProjecTruth. The songs reflected on the psychological and health consequences of sexual activity outside of marriage while celebrating the joys of saving sex until marriage.

POPULATION

Youth aged 12-18 in eight counties in Western New York: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming, with special emphasis on high-risk teens. The target population was comprised of 161,205 adolescents aged 12-18 in the eight counties of western New York State. Parents and the community were also served. Within the 8 counties of Western New York, there continued to be an epidemic of early sexual activity, adolescent pregnancy, abortion, STDs and substance abuse among adolescents. Buffalo, the urban core, had one of the highest pregnancy rates for adolescents in New York State.

OBJECTIVES

Increase the number of youth who:

- 1) develop both healthy relationships in the short-term and healthy marriages in the long-term; and
- 2) intend to remain abstinent or discontinue sexual intercourse after participating in abstinence education and/or mentoring/counseling/after-school abstinence education programs.

The focal purpose of this evaluation was to measure the impact or outcome of the programs. These focused on:

- 1) participation & completion,
- 2) theoretically mediating variables (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, intentions) and
- 3) self-reported behavioral outcomes (e.g., parent-teen communication, sexual activity).

METHODS & ANALYTIC STRATEGY

The evaluation plan included self-report methods to collect data on the following types of outputs: 1) number of sessions attended by each youth (dose measurement), and the number of youth that complete the program (successful participation was measured by 75% attendance); and 2) pre/post/follow-up test data using questions to assess knowledge, attitudes, intentions and behaviors.

The instrument was administered as a pre-test and a post-test, compared with a comparison group (i.e.,2001-2006 ProjecTruth pre-tests, n = 7,552), six and twelve month follow-up tests, and long-term follow-up (i.e., 12th grade).

Analyses used paired/repeated measures dependent t-tests for means and McNemar/chi-squared analyses for frequencies/ percentages where appropriate. Otherwise, independent t-tests for means and chi-squared/crosstabs analyses were used for frequencies/percentages.

PRETEST-POSTTEST RESULTS

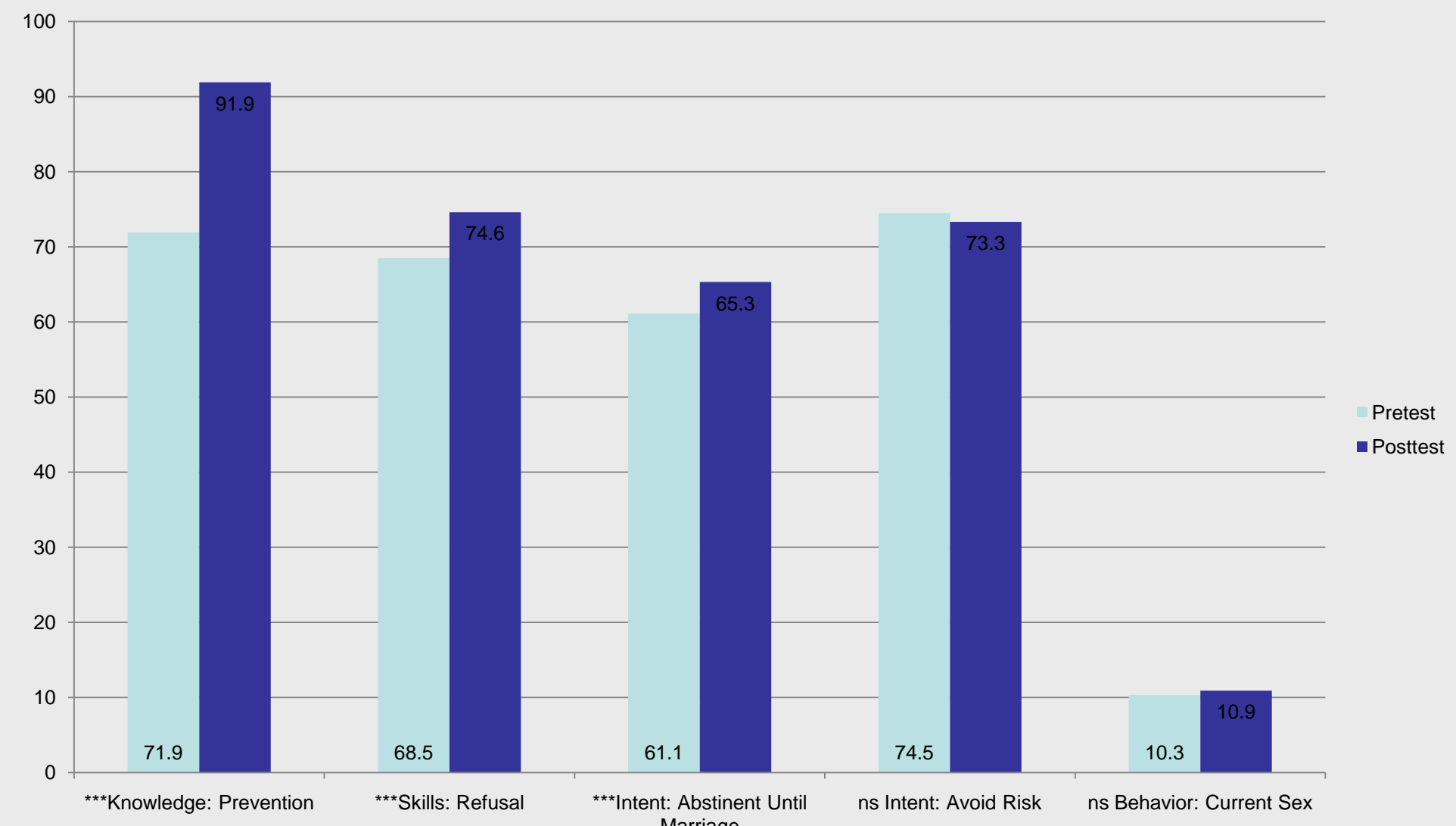


Figure 1. Pretest-Posttest Percentages.

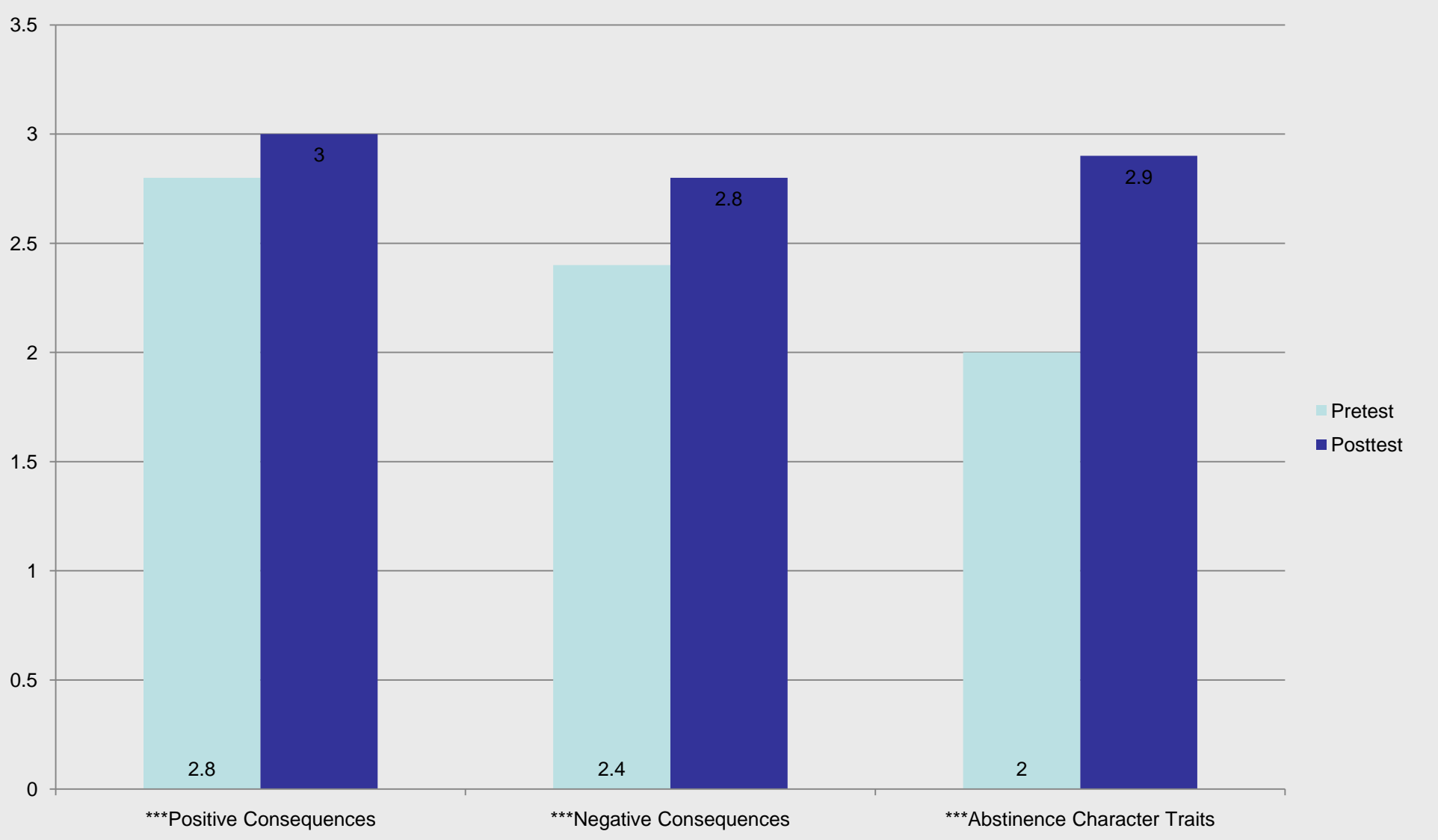


Figure .Pretest-Posttest Means.

PRETEST-POSTTEST x GRADE RESULTS

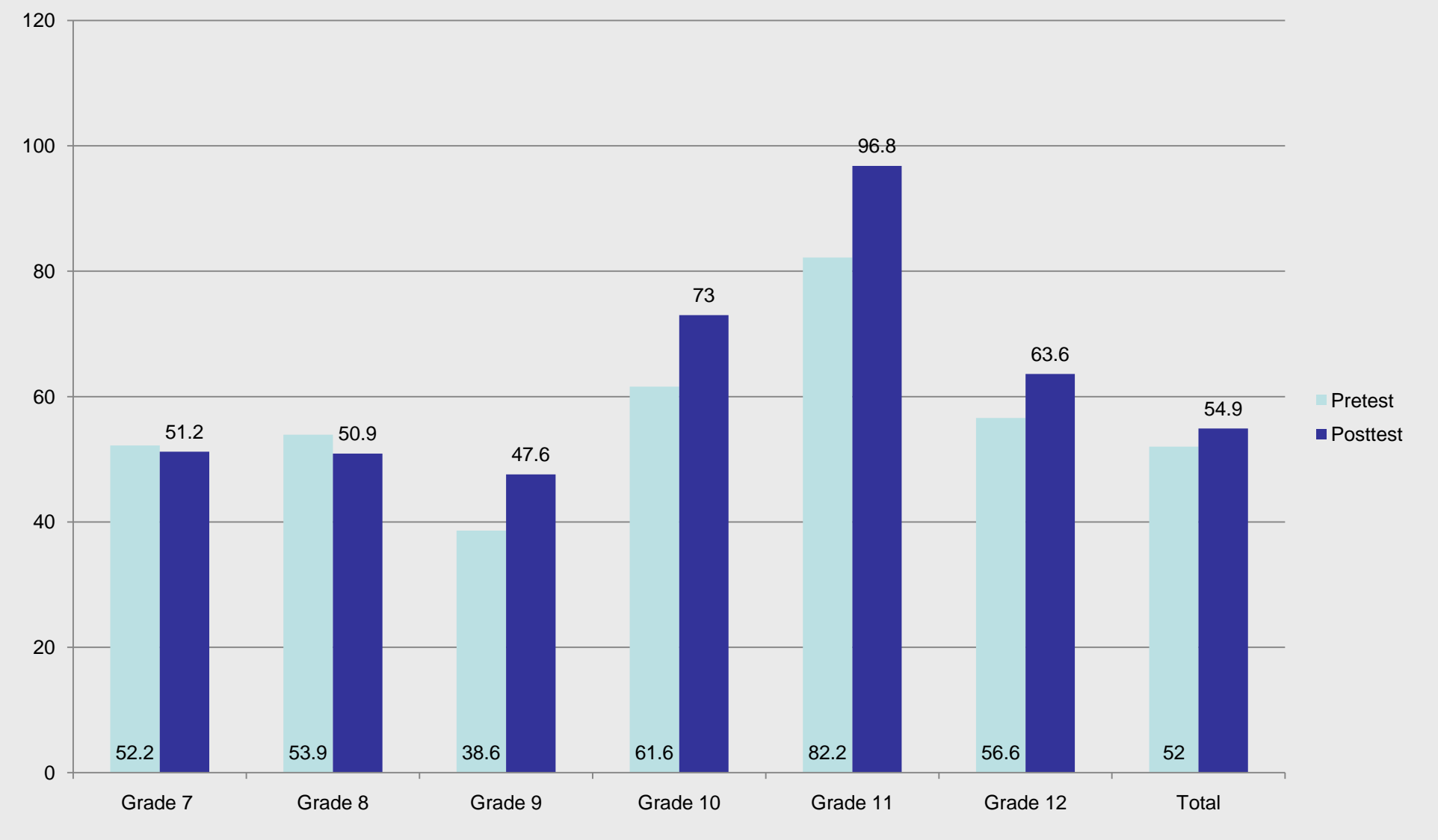


Figure 3. Parent – Teen Communication.

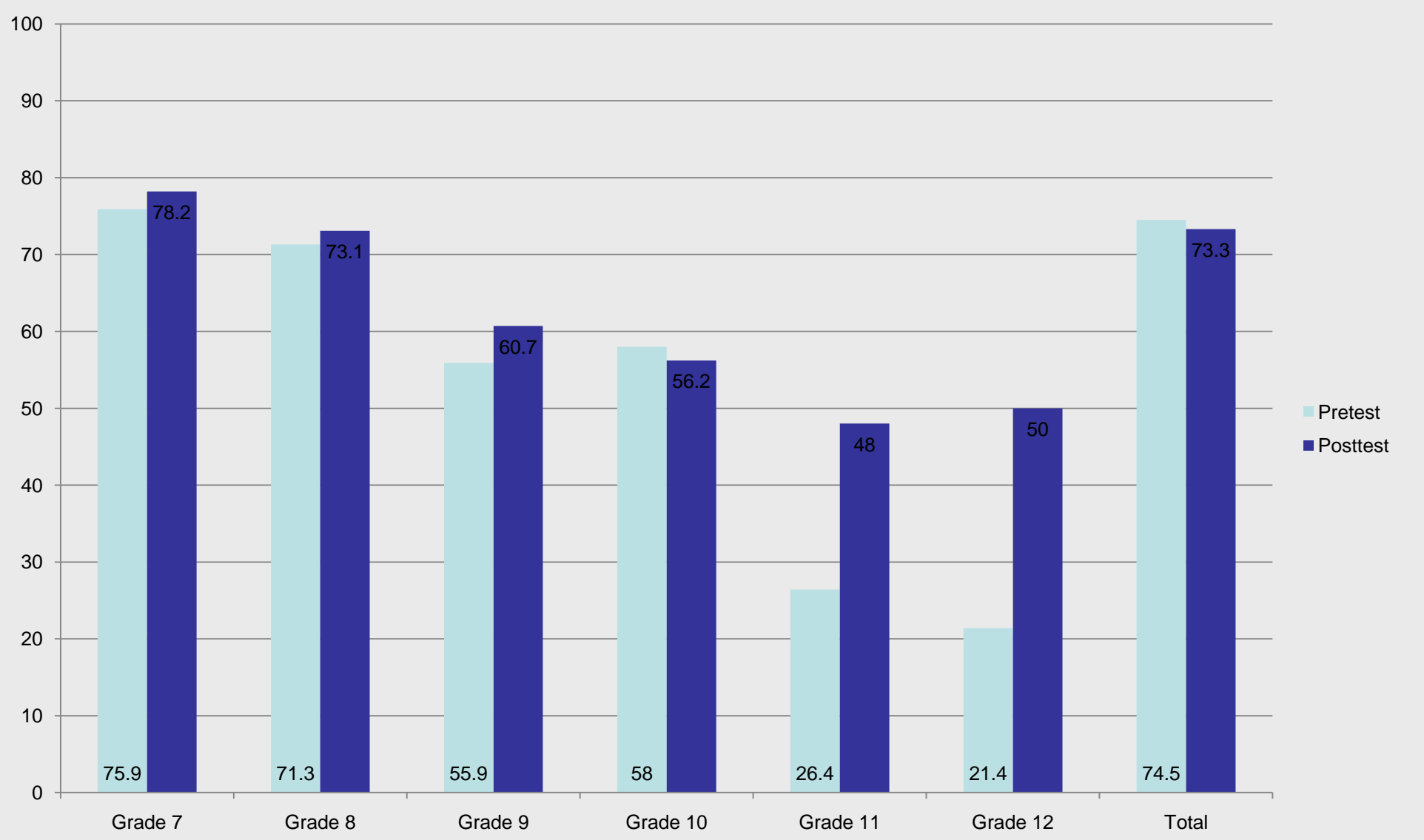


Figure 4. Intention to Remain Abstinent Until Marriage.

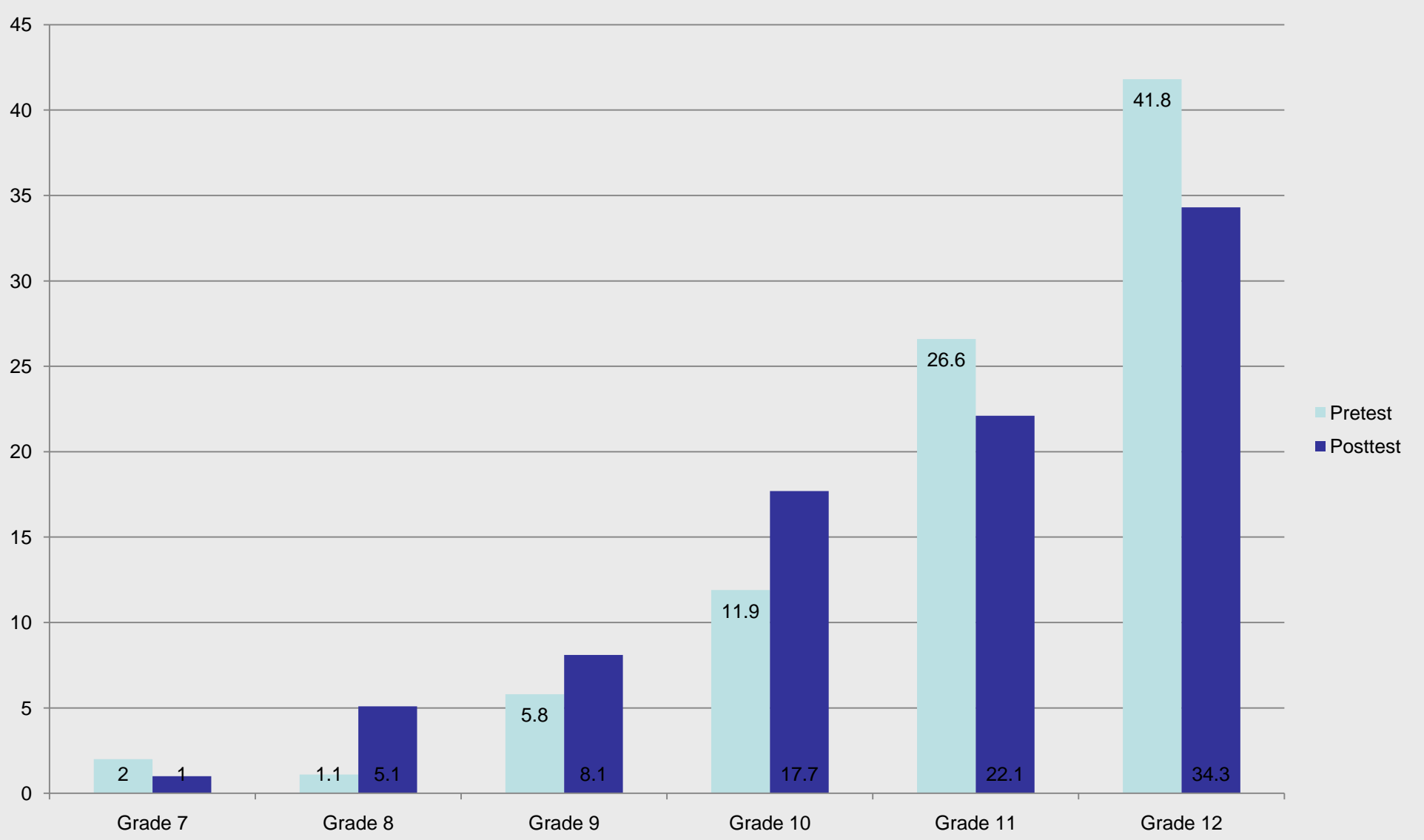


Figure 5. Current Sexual Activity

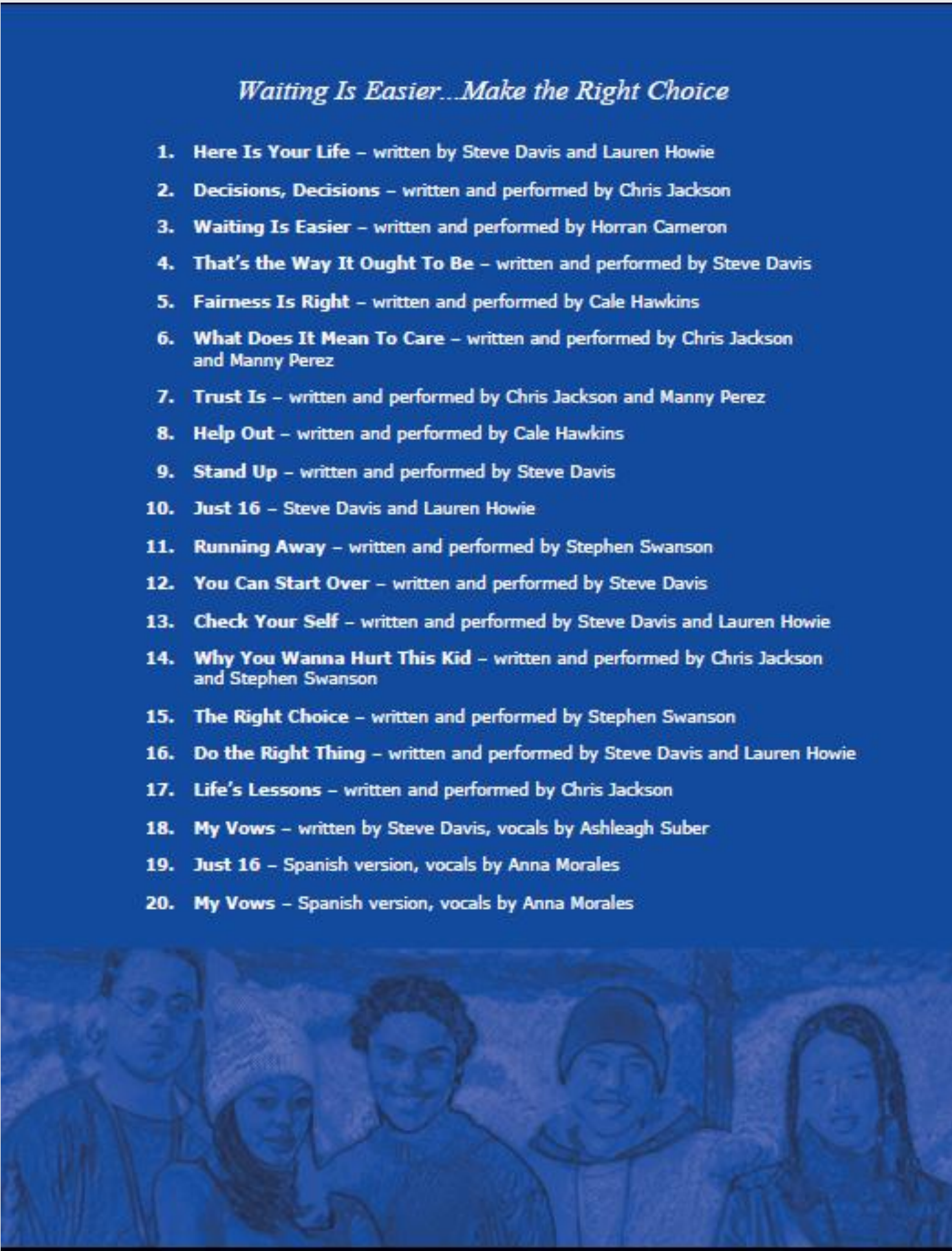
DISCUSSION

Respondents (n = 3,182) reported an average dose of 5.88 sessions (235.2 minutes) and educators reported delivering a typical dose of 6.99 sessions (279.6 minutes). A total of 89.8% of respondents attended a number of sessions that comprised 75% or more of the educator-reported number of sessions for that site.

Overall, the abstinence education curriculum demonstrated consistently significant and lasting effects on knowledge, attitudes, intentions and parent-teen communication behaviors based on pretest-posttest, comparison group, six and twelve month follow-ups. There was not a significant effect on current sexual activity overall, but high school effects were noted.

A post hoc analysis was performed examining the dose relationship between number of classes and current sexually activity. Spearman's r was significant (r = -.169, df = 1795, p < .001) such that the larger the number of classes taught, the less likely the student was to report current sexual activity within the last month.

A non-significant effect was noted for intentions to avoid risky situations, indicating a need to strengthen this aspect of the curriculum or its delivery. It should be noted that most of the effects continued to be significant after twelve months, but some dwindled at the six month (parent-teen communication) or twelve month (character traits) assessment. This suggests the need for strengthening these aspects of the curriculum, its delivery or especially booster sessions.



CONCLUSIONS

The ProjecTruth curriculum generally had consistent and lasting effects on knowledge, attitudes, intentions and behaviors. The implication is that this is an effective program with regard to mediating variables of sexual activity

RECOMMENDATIONS

The rigor, complexity, and extensiveness of this program evaluation provided specific recommendations for areas of the curriculum to be strengthened and which would benefit from annual booster sessions. Specifically, a focus on the avoidance of risky situations, such as those involving alcohol and drugs and decisions to discontinue existing sexual activity could be strengthened. Booster sessions were merited around parent-teen communication and character traits as they relate to abstinence, marriage and parenting.